

VZCZCXR07132  
PP RUEHDBU RUEHLN RUEHVK RUEHYG  
DE RUEHAA #0620/01 1781246

ZNR UUUUU ZZH

P 271246Z JUN 07

FM AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8912

INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE

RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 0371

RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 0393

RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 2081

RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 0830

RUEHKP/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 0181

RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 0878

RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 0094

RUEHCKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI 0143

RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA 0065

RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE 0079

RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI 0104

RUEHPW/AMCONSUL PESHAWAR 0417

RHMFIUU/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC

RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC//DHO-2/REA/NMJIC-J2//

RUEKJCS/Joint STAFF WASHINGTON DC//J5/RUE//

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 ASHGABAT 000620

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN (SNELSIRE), SCA/PPD (KAMP), CA/VO/F/P  
FRANKFURT FOR RCO BROWN

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PGOV SCUL CVIS KPAO TX

SUBJECT: SCA DAS FEIGENBAUM VS. THE TURKMENISTAN BOARD OF  
EDUCATION

REF: ASHGABAT 550

ASHGABAT 00000620 001.2 OF 003

SUMMARY

-----

¶1. (SBU) Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Evan Feigenbaum drew a line in the sand on American values in response to Deputy Chairman for Education, Health, Science, and Technology Hydyr Saparlyev's feeble calls for a joint selection process of participants in exchange programs during their June 25 meeting. Despite numerous attempts to solicit specific ideas on ways to increase cooperation between the two countries, Saparlyev responded only with general statements and unrelated statistics. Both Feigenbaum and Charg pushed unsuccessfully for Saparlyev to give explanations for the lack of cooperation and history of intrusion into programs. The biggest mystery is why President Berdimuhamedov continues to make education reform his highest priority while assigning the task to one of his weakest performers. END SUMMARY.

SAPRARLYEV DODGES QUESTIONS

-----

¶2. (SBU) In opening the meeting, Saparlyev stated that he understood that Feigenbaum was very busy and wished him success in his visit. Feigenbaum responded that the goal of this trip was to exchange ideas and expand cooperation with Turkmenistan in all areas. Cooperation already existed in many areas, but the United States wanted to expand this cooperation everywhere to help Turkmenistan tap into &powerful opportunities in the international economy and international system.<sup>8</sup>

¶3. (SBU) Feigenbaum continued that he specifically wanted to meet with Saparlyev since education is &enormously important.<sup>8</sup> The United States had tried to explore possibilities through an education delegation and had proposed specific ideas for improving education in Turkmenistan. Feigenbaum reaffirmed that, &We already do a lot. The foreign minister wants more. The president wants more. We will do more. We need your help.<sup>8</sup> He asked Saparlyev for constructive, open feedback on ways to expand current programs or for new ideas for health, culture, and education initiatives.

¶4. (SBU) Saparlyev responded by detailing how his ministry was implementing the president's grander vision for Turkmenistan. He listed very general and positive descriptions of &very serious<sup>8</sup> reforms to improve secondary school curriculums, university specializations, sports education, exchange programs, postgraduate research, cultural conferences, health, and tourism, all of which mostly involved spending money on new school buildings, rather than any meaningful attempt at reform. Throughout the monologue Saparlyev made it a point to emphasize that these reforms and projects occurred in the regions and rural areas, not just Ashgabat. Every student in Turkmenistan would have equal education and Turkmenistan was opening all programs for everyone. All proposals would be considered and parties should come to a common agreement for implementation.

¶5. (SBU) Feigenbaum stated that Saparlyev's comments were interesting but that he needed to know Saparlyev's specific suggestions for cooperation with the United States, as we still had received few answers to our suggestions for cooperation presented during ECA DAS Romanowski's visit May 1-5. Saparlyev assured Feigenbaum that the Government of Turkmenistan considered all proposals and agreed to most of

ASHGABAT 00000620 002.2 OF 003

them. Feigenbaum stated that he hoped that was true since there were many good ideas that were agreed upon in the abstract but we now needed to move forward. The American Corners were an important example of cultural exchange, and the problems in opening the Turkmenbashy American Corner were easy to fix; indeed, the only issue was to find a site. The local and national government needed to coordinate their efforts to get it opened. Also, many participants in exchanges had faced harassment. Just a few hours earlier, noted Feigenbaum, education authorities had threatened to fire a Dashoguz English teacher if she participated in the Central Asian Teachers of English Conference in Kyrgyzstan. Saparlyev needed to be helpful in allowing people to go to these conferences if Turkmenistan was really interested in expanding exchange programs. Saparlyev responded that he personally made sure that everyone selected can participate. The teacher in Dashoguz was probably a unique issue.

(Comment: The morning of June 26 post received reports that all CATEC Dashoguz English teachers were threatened in a similar way. Post had informed MFA via diplomatic notes both of the conference itself and of conference participants. An Education Ministry official told Charge his ministry had never received these notes. End Comment.)

FEIGENBAUM: SEPARATE BUT EQUAL DOESN'T WORK

---

¶6. (SBU) Saparlyev countered that he had his own examples of issues with the way programs were run in Turkmenistan. He proposed to do the high school and undergraduate exchange program selection process jointly. Currently, it was considered a "joint" program but was not implemented this way. For example, programs have not selected many students from the rural areas and regions even though all areas of Turkmenistan have had the same level of education. The Education Ministry was prepared to "assist" the selection process by providing recommendations of which students were "psychologically suited" and had the "appropriate background" to represent Turkmenistan on these programs. (Comment:

Ministry of Education officials have long argued that ethnic Turkmen purity should be a requisite for participating in high school exchange programs. End Comment.)

¶17. (SBU) Feigenbaum agreed that equal opportunities for rural and urban students were important and that merit was the sole criterion for selection in U.S. programs. Saparlyev added again that the Education Ministry should be a part of the decision-making process. Feigenbaum countered that everyone should take the exam to earn their place and thus ensure equal opportunity for urban and rural students. The United States had had its own experience with attempting to implement separate but equal education standards and now firmly had rejected this philosophy. Feigenbaum reviewed the debate surrounding the Brown v. Board of Education case in the United States. Ultimately, he said, Americans had forged a consensus around the principle of equal opportunities for all.

#### OFFERS FOR CONTINUED COOPERATION

---

¶18. (SBU) Feigenbaum stated that he was glad Saparlyev understood and that there were a lot of other opportunities. The United States wished to increase funding and cooperation in the areas of health and culture as well. The United States had a lot of ideas that it would share and he hoped the Government of Turkmenistan had many too. Saparlyev replied that he was thankful for U.S. interest, work, and

ASHGABAT 00000620 003.2 OF 003

assistance in developing Turkmenistan and would consider all of the suggestions. Feigenbaum noted that during his talk with the president, they had agreed to expand government contacts. Saparlyev should explore the idea of sending his education and health ministers to the United States. He hoped Saparlyev liked the idea and would be willing to implement it. Saparlyev replied that these types of programs were working in Turkmenistan as they have had exchanges already with many other countries. But the United States needed to consider certain details and schedules related to education when planning these visits.

#### COMMENT

---

¶19. (SBU) The U.S. invitation for Education Minister Annaamanov to visit Washington, DC, if the latter accepts -- or is permitted to accept -- will present an opportunity to show him model programs for primary and secondary education as well the best of American higher education. The Education Ministry remains the single greatest impediment to either consideration or implementation of meaningful cooperation, and Minister Annaamanov's boss, Saparlyev, isn't being helpful. Education Ministry officials refuse to speak directly with embassy representatives; and the ministry officials personally contact applicants to USG programs and threaten them with job loss if they participate. This is the same ministry charged with developing and implementing what the president calls his highest priority -- educational reform. This harassment aside, grassroots interest in USG education programs remains high, and the president personally reiterated his interest in expanded U.S.-Turkmen education cooperation during a meeting earlier in the day. Getting USG education cooperation projects "unstuck" remains a challenge. End Comment.

¶10. DAS Feigenbaum has cleared this message.  
BRUSH